

OP-EDS

# NEVER TOO LATE TO CALL COLLEGE A SCAM

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Student loan debt has risen steadily in the years since Barbara Ehrenreich saw that its “return on investment” isn’t looking that good” in 2006. Public domain.

By the time that the United States Supreme Court decided *Joseph R. Biden, President of the United States, et al. v. Nebraska, et al.* on June 30, it was no longer surprising that a majority Republican Court would side against a Democratic administration in opposing broad executive power to forgive student debt — even if the supposed presidential authority for doing so ultimately descended from a claim by George W. Bush in 2002.

It wasn’t the “‘U.S. Does Whatever It Wants’ plan, which would have permitted the U.S. to take any action it wished anywhere in the world at any time” as explained in [The Onion’s satire](#).

These days, Democrats are the ones eager to interpret the Higher Education Relief Opportunities For Students (HEROES) Act as granting carte blanche over American campuses, while Republicans like Associate Justice Amy Coney Barrett [observe](#) that “an instruction to ‘pick up dessert’ is not permission to buy a four-tier wedding cake.”

Initial support for the HEROES Act was bipartisan, so it might seem that the parties of plutocrats and educrats merely drifted back toward their default settings.

Biden **frames** his case as “providing relief to millions of hard-working Americans” rather than “billions in pandemic-related loans to businesses.” He doesn’t mention *It’s a Wonderful Life*, but clearly aims to evoke something like the real-life equivalent of the cinematic Bailey Bros. Building & Loan Association lending a hand to the little guys instead of fat-cat Scrooges like “Henry F. Potter, the richest and meanest man in the county.”

Yet just as George Bailey paying him off further enriches Mr. Potter (whose comeuppance had to wait for a 1986 *Saturday Night Live* **skit**), subsidized student loans prop up the ever-rising costs that make taking on debt a commonplace prerequisite for college attendance in the first place.

Addressing her nephew’s graduating class of 2006, Barbara Ehrenreich **wrote** that “it’s too soon to call college a scam, and as long as they teach a few truly enlightening things, like history and number theory, I won’t.”

Half a century earlier, Howard Zinn avoided taking Richard Hofstadter’s history classes at Columbia University after “hearing consistently that Hofstadter was not a particularly good teacher because he was so focused on his writing” (in the **words** of Zinn biographer Davis Joyce), but was deeply influenced by Hofstadter’s books, especially *The American Political Tradition*. Aspiring historians can order a copy online for less than 0.1% of the five-figure cost of annual tuition, the postgrad usefulness of which Ehrenreich notes may be confined to knowing how to “pronounce the day’s specials” while waiting tables.

As Dana Carvey’s Bailey asked, “What are we waiting for?”

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## PUBLICATION/CITATION HISTORY

1. “**Never too late to call college a scam**” by Joel Schlosberg, Wahpeton, North Dakota *Daily News*, July 3, 2023
2. “**Never too late to call college a scam**” by Joel Schlosberg, *The Enterprise* [Wilson, North Carolina], July 10, 2023
3. “**Never Too Late to Call College a Scam**” by Joel Schlosberg, *Carolina Panorama* [Columbia, South Carolina], July 19, 2023
4. “**Opinion: Never too late to call college a scam**” by Joel Schlosberg, Newton, Iowa *Daily News*, July 25, 2023